



# PRESS RELEASE

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **ALLEGED DRUG KINGPIN ARRESTED IN COLOMBIA**

U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the unsealing of an Indictment of a native of Cali, Colombia on federal cocaine trafficking charges. Joaquin Mario Valencia-Trujillo was arrested Friday, January 31, 2003 in Bogota, Colombia. The defendant is charged with conspiracy to import cocaine, conspiracy to distribute and intent to distribute cocaine, conspiracy to engage in money laundering and operating a continuing criminal enterprise. The continuing criminal enterprise charge carries a potential sentence of twenty years to life imprisonment. The importation and distribution conspiracies carry a potential sentence, if convicted, ranging from ten years to life imprisonment. The money laundering conspiracy count carries a maximum sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.

The Indictment was returned, under seal, in August 2002 and the arrest of Valencia-Trujillo marks another milestone in the ongoing international smuggling investigation, dubbed "Panama Express." The defendant was taken into custody at the Colombian prosecutors office in Bogota on Friday, where Valencia-Trujillo had appeared with his

attorney on another matter. Formal extradition papers have been presented to bring the defendant to Tampa, Florida for prosecution on the charges set forth in the Indictment.

United States Attorney Paul I. Perez remarked: "We applaud all the law enforcement entities, foreign and domestic, that contributed to this investigation. Through our combined efforts, we have extended the reach of our drug enforcement investigation from the streets of the United States to the streets of Colombia." Mr. Perez particularly acknowledged the contributions of The United States Coast Guard (USCG), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Customs Service (USCS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), The Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF), Colombian Navy and the Colombian National Police. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph K. Ruddy and W. Stephen Muldrow of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Middle District of Florida.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

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